



## Condor Frequently Asked Questions

California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*: gym- no- jips)

What is the difference between condors and turkey vultures?

Size is one of the more obvious differences, but can be hard to tell when the bird is in flight. Turkey Vultures typically have a 5 foot wing span while condors can have 9.5 foot wing spans. The underside of the bird is another great way to tell the difference. Turkey vultures have a lighter color on the lower part underneath their wings. Condors have a tawny or white section at the leading or top edge of the underside of their wings.

How big are they? Weight? Wing span?

They can weigh approximately 20lbs with a length between 45 to 55 inches. They have an impressive wingspan (largest of any North American bird) of about 9.5 feet.

How many condors are there in the park?

There are 34 condors that have been released or hatched at Pinnacles National Monument, along with the 30 released or hatched at Big Sur. The condors will intermingle between here and Big Sur and vice versa. On any given day you could see upwards of 20 condors in the park or as few as one or even none.

How long do they live?

Though no one has studied condors for long enough to know for sure, the best estimates are that they can live to around 45- 55 years.

Do they all have radio tags? Why?

Yes, all of the released and wild- fledged condors have radio tags. We place tags on them so that biologists can keep track of how they're doing. This is a way to make sure that they are perching, roosting, or nesting in areas that are safe for them. (I.e. not next to roadways or low to the ground where predators could harm them) Having them radio- tagged also allows biologists to locate where a condor may have died so that we may collect the remains for a necropsy, to test for a cause of death.

When do they reach maturity/nest? How many eggs do they lay? How long until fledged?

Condors do not reach sexual maturity until they are around 5- 7 years of age. Condors lay only one egg during each nesting attempt. After hatching the young bird spends around six months in the nest before fledging (leaving the nest). The fledgling condor will normally stay with the parents for a year before going off on its own. This reproductive cycle means that condors cannot sustain high mortality levels being that it takes about ten years for a pair to breed and produce two offspring.

What do they feed on?

Condors are strictly scavengers and feed on carrion (dead animals). They have been observed feeding on animals as small as ground squirrels and as big as gray whales. Part of what they are doing while soaring high above the ground is searching for food.

Why are they endangered?

There are several reasons for the decline in condor populations. Habitat destruction and over-hunting for museum and private collections played a roll. Egg collectors contributed to the decimation of the condor's numbers as well. Currently lead poisoning is the leading cause of concern for the wild population of condors. Since condors are scavengers they only eat animals that are dead. Some of what is dead on the landscape has been shot and traditional ammunition is made of lead. As animals are shot with lead ammunition the bullets fragment and deposit lead in the carcass. Condors and other scavengers may unintentionally ingest lead while feeding on these food sources.

Where is the best place to see a condor in the park?

The best place is to get closer to where condors like to be, which is up high. The High Peaks Trail offers the best chance at seeing a condor in the park. North Chalone also offers an option of being higher up.

Where can I go for more information?

Pinnacles National Monument Website: <http://www.nps.gov/pinn/naturescience/condors.htm>

